

METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR PROVIDING COMMUNICATIONS SECURITY USING A REMOTE SERVER

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention generally relates to communications security. In particular, the present invention relates to providing security for a communications network using an encryption algorithm that is remote from a communications device.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Communications security is of increasing concern. Often, computers communicate over a network by passing encrypted data to one another. The encryption of data allows computer systems to verify the source of data, and to protect data from eavesdropping while that data is in transit. Encryption is typically performed using encryption keys or encryption key pairs in combination with an encryption algorithm. Data encrypted using an encryption algorithm in connection with a unique key prevents an eavesdropper from easily accessing the encrypted data. In addition, such encryption provides a way for a receiving computer to validate the source of the encrypted data, because presumably only authorized computers possess the key necessary to encrypt data in such a way that it can be decrypted by the receiving computer. Accordingly, data encryption can be used in connection with providing security to a communications network or to applications associated with such a network.

The use of mobile computers, such as laptops and personal digital assistants (PDAs) is becoming increasingly widespread. Such devices are useful in providing users with a connection to network services even when the user is away from the user's full-

featured desktop computer. Such devices can also be used to provide telephony services even when the user is away from the user's desk top telephone. For example, IP telephony allows computers, to function as voice communication devices using computer networks as a transmission medium.

5 However, the use of data encryption in connection with mobile devices can be problematic. For example, such devices may not feature the resources found in a typical desktop computer. Therefore, the ability of such devices to run certain security algorithms is limited. In addition, the easy portability of such devices makes those devices, and any programming code stored in them, vulnerable to theft. Additionally, the distribution of security algorithms to a number of computer devices increases the risk that the code used to implement those algorithms will be circumvented. In addition, where alterations to the security algorithm are necessary (for example, when the original algorithm has been hacked or to update or increase the security of the algorithm), it can be extremely difficult to provide the modified algorithm to all of the devices that need access to the secured features of a network.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is directed to solving these and other problems and disadvantages of the prior art. Generally, according to the present invention, a security server is provided for controlling access to applications or communications systems.

20 According to the present invention, the security server contains the security algorithm used to encrypt data in connection with validating a request for access to an application or a communications system protected by the security server.

According to one embodiment of the present invention, the security server contains software that includes an encryption algorithm, and is interconnected to a local area network (LAN). The LAN is generally used to pass communications between a computer or communications device requesting access to a protected application or communications system and the security server. Also interconnected to the LAN is an application server or a communications server through which the desired application or communications service may be accessed. Accordingly, the LAN is also used to pass communications between the communications device and the communications server.

In order to obtain access to the application or communication service, the communications device requesting access may send its request to the communications server over the LAN. In response, the communications server may issue a token to the communications device. The communications device requesting access may then pass the token to the security server together with a password and a user identifier. The user password and identifier may be encrypted using A simple encryption algorithm provided on the communications device. The security server, having received the token and password, then encrypts the token using the password as an encryption key. The security server sends the encrypted token to the communications device requesting access, which forwards the encrypted token to the communications server. The communications server may then decrypt and validate the token. If the token matches the original token sent from the communications server, the requested access is granted.

According to another embodiment of the present invention, the user interconnects to a computer network, such as a LAN, using a communications device configured to provide an Internet Protocol (IP) telephone. In response to a request that a telephone

extension of a communications system be transferred to the communications device, the communications server passes a token to the communications device. The communications device then provides the token and a password to a security server also connected to the LAN. The security server encrypts the token, using the password as the encryption key, and returns the encrypted token to the communications device. The communications device then passes the encrypted token to the communications server. The communications server decrypts the token. If the password and encryption algorithm used to encrypt the token are valid, the decrypted token will be identical to the token originally sent from the communications server to the communications device. If the decrypted token matches the token originally sent by the communications server, the requested telephone extension is transferred to the communications device.

In accordance with a further embodiment of the present invention, when access to a telephone extension provided as part of a communications system is granted, the requesting communications device is provided with all of the features available to a user through the transferred extension. For example, with the communications device the user can dial from the transferred extension, and can access all of the features available from, for example, the user's desk telephone from which the extension normally associated with the user's desk telephone is transferred.

These and other advantages and features of the invention will become more apparent from the following description of an illustrative embodiment of the invention taken together with the drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a block diagram of a computer network that includes a security server in

accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 2 is a flowchart illustrating the operation of an embodiment of the present invention; and

Fig. 3 is a flowchart illustrating the transfer of a telephone extension in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Fig. 1 illustrates a computer network **100** interconnected to the public switched telephone network **104**. In general, the computer network **100** includes an application or communications server **108** in communication with the public switched telephone network **104** (PSTN) and a local area network **112**. According to one embodiment of the present invention, the communications server **108** is a private branch exchange (PBX) server, such as the DEFINITY® server available from the assignee of the present invention. A network server **116** may be interconnected to the LAN **112** for controlling functions related to the LAN **112**, such as controlling access to the LAN **112**. A security server **120** is also interconnected to the LAN **112**.

A plurality of computers or communications devices **124** may also be interconnected to the LAN **112**. For example, a first communications device **124a** labeled personal digital assistant (PDA) in **Fig. 1**, and a second communications device **124b**, labeled desk telephone in **Fig. 1**, may be interconnected to the LAN **112**. Furthermore, the communications devices **124** may be interconnected to the LAN **112** in a variety of ways. For example, the first communications device **124a** is interconnected to the LAN **112** via a wireless extension **128** of the LAN **112** (also referred to herein as wireless LAN **128**), while the second communications device **124b** is interconnected to

the LAN **112** by a wired interconnection **132**.

According to an embodiment of the present invention, each of the communications devices **124** are provided with a speaker, a microphone, and application programming enabling those devices **124** to be utilized as Internet Protocol (IP)

5 telephones. Accordingly, the communications devices **124** can be used in connection with voice communications that are carried at least in part over the LAN **112**.

Furthermore, the communications devices **124** can be used to place voice telephone calls that are carried at least in part over the PSTN **104**. Accordingly, the communications

10 devices **124** may utilize a voice over IP (VoIP) protocol, such as the H.323 stack, for transferring voice communications over the LAN **112**. According to still another embodiment of the present invention, one or both devices may be provided with a reduced H.323 stack. For example, the devices **124** may be provided with only those portions of the H.323 stack that are required to perform all or a plurality of the functions available in connection with the communications server **108**. The provision of a reduced
15 H.323 stack is particularly useful in connection with devices such as personal digital assistants (*e.g.*, first communications device **124a**) in which the available memory is limited.

The second computing device **124b** may be an IP telephone. For example, the second communications device **124b** may include a desk top telephone interconnected to
20 a private branch exchange provided in connection with the LAN **112** and the communications server **108**. As will be appreciated by one of skill in the art, the desktop telephone **124b** may have available to it a variety of features, including the ability to

answer calls placed to an associated extension; to place a call; to dial digits over an existing call; to hang up a call; to place a call on hold; to transfer a call; to place a conference call; to display caller information; to display the name of the caller; to allow the user to screen pop into the directory database application; to store information such as the name, number, time, date, duration, etc. on all calls in the log database; to allow the user to take notes that can be stored with other information regarding the call in the log database; to handle multiple call appearances; to press buttons that are administered for the station; to display state information; to display voice mail and message status; to adjust volume level; to allow dial pad capabilities; and to allow the user to rename the features downloaded from the communications server **108**.

The PDA **124a** may also have access to the communications features provided by the communications server **108**. In accordance with one embodiment of the present invention, the PDA is granted access to the features associated with the second communications device **128b** after a properly encrypted token is received at said first communications device. For example, the first communications device **124a** may be granted access to a telephone extension, and any standard or customized features created in connection with that telephone extension, that are normally associated with the second communications device **124b**, as will be described in greater detail below.

With reference now to **Fig. 2**, the operation of a system **100** provided in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention will be explained. Initially, at step **200**, a user logs onto the network **112** using the first communications device **124a**. With respect to the example of **Fig. 1**, logging onto the network **112** may include

establishing a connection with the local area network **112** over a wireless extension **128** of the LAN **112**. Furthermore, logging onto the LAN **112** may include providing user identifier information, such as a login name and password. As will be appreciated by one of skill in the art, the network server **116** generally controls access to the LAN **112**. Thus, the network server **116**, upon receipt of the user name and password, can determine whether to grant access to the LAN **112** by the communications device **124a**.

After successfully logging on to the LAN **112**, the first communications device **124a** requests moving a telephone extension assigned to the second communications device **124b** to the first communications device **124a** (step **204**). In response to the request to move the telephone extension, the communications server **108** sends a token to the first communications device **124a** (step **208**). In general, before a communications device **124** is granted access to the features of the communications server **108**, the token must be properly validated and returned to the communications server **108**. In order to validate the token, the first communications device **124a** sends the token, a password, and a user identifier, such as a login name, to the security server **120** (step **212**). The password and user identifier may be encrypted using a simple encryption algorithm provided on the first communications device **124a** before they are sent to the security server **120**, in which case the security server decrypts the password and user identifier upon receiving them. The security server **120** then encrypts the token using the password as the key (step **216**).

The security server **120** next sends the encrypted token to the first communications device **124a** (step **220**). The first communications device then sends the

encrypted token to the communications server **108** (step **224**). Accordingly, it can be appreciated that the token appears to have been encrypted (or validated) by the first communications device **124a** itself. However, the encryption algorithm used to validate the token is not stored on the first communications device **124a**. Instead, the encryption
5 algorithm is stored on the security server **120**.

The communications server **108** decrypts the encrypted token (step **228**). In general, the communications server **108** is able to decrypt the token because it has been provided with a decryption algorithm complimenting the algorithm used to encrypt the token. Also, the communications server **108** has knowledge of the password.

10 Accordingly, if the password provided from the first communications device **124a** and the encryption algorithm used to validate the token are both valid, the decrypted token will match the token originally provided to the first communications device **124a**. At step **232**, the communications server **108** determines whether the decrypted token in fact matches the token originally provided to the first communications device **124a**. If the
15 tokens match, the extension assigned to the second communications device **124b** is transferred to the first communications device **124a**, and the first communications device **124a** is granted access to the features associated with that extension, and that had been accessible through the second communications device **124b** (step **236**). If the decrypted token does not match the token as it was originally provided to the first communications
20 device **124a**, the first communications device **124a** is denied access to the features associated with the telephone extension identified at step **204**, and the telephone extension is not transferred (step **240**).

With reference now to **Fig. 3**, the steps taken by a user to transfer a telephone extension in connection with an embodiment of the present invention are illustrated.

Initially, at step **300**, the user establishes a wireless connection to the local area network

112 using a PDA **124a**. Next, the user enters a user name and password to log on to the

5 LAN **112** (step **304**). As noted above, the network server **116** is generally operative to control access to the LAN **112**. Accordingly, the network server **116** determines whether the user name and password are valid. If the user name and password are valid, the PDA **124a** is allowed to communicate to other devices over the LAN **112**.

At step **308**, the user requests the assignment of the user's desk telephone
10 extension to the PDA **124a**. For example, the user may request that the extension assigned to the desk telephone **124b** be transferred to the PDA **124a**. In general, the features of one IP telephone may be transferred to another, for example where the features associated with the telephone are stored in a central location, such as on the communications server **108**.

15 At step **312**, the user enters a password necessary for access to the communications system **100** (step **312**). Assuming the entry of a valid password, the features of the user's desk telephone **124b** are then made available to the user's PDA **124a** (step **316**).

According to an embodiment of the present invention, a transferred extension may
20 be returned to the second communications device **124b** automatically, after the first communications device disconnects or logs off from the LAN. In addition or alternatively, the transferred extension may be manually returned to the second

communications device **124b** in response to a command issued by the user, through the first **124a** or second **124b** devices, or by an administrator of the communications system **100**.

From the above description, it can be appreciated that the present invention enables an encryption algorithm to be located in a central location, even when it is intended for use in connection with a number of distributed computers or communications devices **124** interconnected to one another by a computer network, such as a LAN **112**. Accordingly, copies of the encryption algorithm does not need to be distributed to individual communications devices **124**. The maintenance of the security algorithm in a central location provides improved system security by limiting the access of would be hackers to the code used to implement the encryption algorithm. In addition, the maintenance of the encryption algorithm in a central location, such as the security server **120**, allows alterations to that algorithm to be made, without requiring changes to the software stored on individual communications devices **124**. Also, the communications devices **124** are not required to implement the encryption algorithm, allowing stronger encryption algorithms than may otherwise be possible using the limited resources of certain communications devices **124** to be used.

As described above, the present invention is particular useful in connection with IP telephony associated with a private branch exchange. For example, using an embodiment of the present invention, a user may retain all the capabilities of that user's office desk telephone, even while the user is outside of their office. For example, the user may receive telephone calls placed to their extension, and conveniently access voice mail

messages using a portable communications device wirelessly interconnected to the communications server **108**. In addition, the user may access customized features, such as dialing directories, from the communications device to which the extension normally associated with the desk telephone has been transferred.

5 It should be appreciated that the present invention is not limited to transferring extensions to portable communications devices. For example, a system in accordance with the present invention may allow a user to access the features of their desk telephone from a telephone located in another office.

10 Although the present invention is described in connection with VoIP telephony, its application is not so limited. In particular, the present invention is useful in connection with any computer network, and in particular with any computer network to which a large number of individual devices may be interconnected. Accordingly, the communications device **124a** may simply make a request to the application server **108** for access to the communications system **100** (in this case, a computer network). The
15 passing of a token and encryption of that token by a security server **120** may then proceed as described above.

 The ability of the present invention to allow a remote communications device **124** to access the features and identity of a telephone extension normally assigned to another communications device **124** also can be used to reduce telephone toll charges. For
20 example, a user may request that the telephone extension of the user's desk telephone be transferred to a PDA even if the user is in a different country from where the desk telephone is located. All that is required is an Internet Protocol network connection with

the communications server **108** and the server **120**. Once the extension is successfully transferred, the PDA may be used to make telephone calls to numbers that are local to the desk telephone. Accordingly, it should also be appreciated that the present invention may be used in connection with wide area networks (WANs) or the public Internet.

5 The foregoing discussion of the invention has been presented for purposes of illustration and description. Further, the description is not intended to limit the invention to the form disclosed herein. Consequently, variations and modifications commensurate with the above teachings, within the skill and knowledge of the relevant art, are within the scope of the present invention. Embodiments described hereinabove are further
10 intended to explain the best mode presently known of practicing the invention to enable others skilled in the art to utilize the invention in such or in other embodiments and with various modifications required by their particular application or use of the invention. It is intended that the appended claims be construed to include alternative embodiments to the extent permitted by the prior art.